

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN RE: :
: :
THE EL FARO INCIDENT OFF : NTSB Accident No.
THE COAST OF THE BAHAMAS ON : DCA16MM001
OCTOBER 1, 2015 :
: :

Monday,
November 23, 2015

Teleconference

Interview of: EMILY PUSATERE

BEFORE:

BRIAN YOUNG, NTSB
CARRIE BELL, NTSB
MIKE KUCHARSKI, NTSB
KATY CHISOM, NTSB

This transcript was produced from audio
provided by the National Transportation Safety Board.

APPEARANCES:

On Behalf of the U.S. Coast Guard:

KEITH FAWCETT
U.S. Coast Guard

P-R-O-C-E-E-D-I-N-G-S

MR. YOUNG: And just so you know Emily, the NTSB -- the purpose of this investigation is to increase safety. We are not here whatsoever to assign fault, blame, or liability. Like we've talked about, we will do a transcript and that will go into the public docket. And that you can have one representative of your choice which, obviously you've chosen to have counsel with you.

We, as the NTSB, we are an independent federal agency. We are charged to determine the probable cause of the accident. We are trying to promote transportation safety. Our agency is not part of the DOT or the Coast Guard and we have no regulatory or enforcement powers.

And as Mike had said too, we do have a party system. ABS, American Bureau of Shipping, the Coast Guard, and TOTE are the parties to this investigation. So they're all working together. And the reason we have them is because they can provide technical expertise and help us learn the ship, learn the way the company operates and try to assist us in determining the probable cause.

We are currently in the fact finding portion of this investigation. We're trying to get as many

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1 facts as we can. And talking to people like you are a
2 tremendous help to us. You have good communication,
3 emails, phone calls with your husband and the crew.
4 And possibly pictures and those kinds of things we'll
5 be asking for.

6 If there's any questions you don't
7 understand or don't know, please feel free to ask us to
8 rephrase it or to say I don't know. And like we
9 discussed too, we are going to record this interview
10 and have it transcribed. And again, we all appreciate
11 very much taking the time to talk to us, trying to give
12 us as much information as you have.

13 MS. PUSATERE: Okay. Great.

14 MR. YOUNG: Do you have any general
15 questions for us or anything interview wise that we can
16 answer, to the best of our abilities?

17 MS. PUSATERE: As I'm gaining more access to
18 my husband's information, you know, obviously his
19 personal computer would be with him and whatnot. But
20 I'm working on trying to get access to his email and
21 stuff like that. Should anything of interest come up
22 as I'm, you know, gaining access to things, would it be
23 possible for me to reach out to you guys again? If
24 there's something that I don't necessarily know now but
25 I may find out in the future.

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1 MR. YOUNG: Absolutely. And at the end of
2 this, this morning, what I'll do is I'll send you an
3 email with all of our contact information to everybody
4 on this, phone and email. Any or all of us can put you
5 in touch with Katy as well.

6 MALE PARTICIPANT: Great. Thanks.

7 MR. YOUNG: Absolutely. That's a huge help.
8 If you don't mind Emily, just up front, can you just
9 give us a little background on how long Rich has been
10 with TOTE and how long he worked on El Faro?

11 MS. PUSATERE: I'm not 100 percent sure how
12 long he's been with TOTE. I do have his employment
13 records. I could probably go back through them but I
14 don't have the exact date. I know he's been with them
15 since I've been with him and that's been over five
16 years. I'm pretty sure he got with them shortly after
17 graduation. I think he worked with Maersk for like a
18 year or two and then when to TOTE Maritime.

19 MR. YOUNG: And had he been on any other
20 ships other than El Faro?

21 MS. PUSATERE: Yes. He's been on the
22 Westward Venture. He was on the El Faro, the El Morro,
23 and the El Yunque. And then as far as I know, he would
24 kind of rotate between the three depending on where
25 they needed him. He actually sent the El Morro to

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1 scrap.

2 MR. YOUNG: Okay. And being another Fort
3 Schuyler alumni, what did year did he get out of
4 Schuyler?

5 MS. PUSATERE: 2003.

6 MR. YOUNG: '03? And was he on a pretty
7 steady rotation with a set --

8 MS. PUSATERE: It's supposed to be ten weeks
9 on, ten weeks off but it seldom actually worked out
10 that way.

11 MR. YOUNG: Was it pretty close or was it --

12 MS. PUSATERE: It would depend. Like
13 sometimes it would be a week or two. I'm sorry, my
14 daughter is wrestling with at the moment. He would do
15 ten weeks on, ten weeks off. And then like, you know,
16 sometimes he would have difficulties getting
17 replacements. Sometimes they'd need him to stay on
18 longer. When he sailed his first trip as Chief, he
19 actually had to extend from what would have been his
20 ten weeks finishing up on one ship as a First Engineer.
21 He's been a Chief for approximately two years.

22 MR. YOUNG: So when he got promoted they had
23 to cover some extra time of work into the schedule?

24 MS. PUSATERE: Yes, correct.

25 MR. YOUNG: Okay. So he's been sailing

1 Chief for the last two years --

2 MS. PUSATERE: Yes. I believe it was around
3 September, 2013 when he went to Chief. Maybe August.

4 MR. YOUNG: And was he Chief of El Faro or
5 Chief of any other ship?

6 MS. PUSATERE: He was Chief of El Faro. I'm
7 not sure -- because like I said, they'd swap around.
8 So sometimes I wouldn't even know which ship he was on,
9 to be honest. I sound like a terrible maritime wife.

10 MR. YOUNG: No.

11 MS. PUSATERE: All the Els, the El Yunque,
12 the El Morro, the El Faro. You know, I get confused.
13 Because most times they would go out -- I know recently
14 he'd been on the El Yunque. But it might have been
15 also the El Morro. So I apologize for not knowing for
16 certain. I was finishing up school and having a baby
17 at the same time. There was a lot going on.

18 MR. YOUNG: Wow. Yes. My wife was the same
19 way with the cable ships. There were eight of them.
20 She didn't ever know which one it was as long as the
21 pay came.

22 MS. PUSATERE: Sometimes I would send out
23 emails to all three ships hoping I would find him.

24 MR. YOUNG: That's the way to do it. And
25 was there any talk about going to the new ships, one of

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1 the LNG? Is there any possibility that your husband
2 might have been chosen to go over there?

3 MS. PUSATERE: This is kind of like a drawn
4 out saga for him. Back when the prospect of those
5 ships first started, you know, they brought it up to
6 him. And of course, he was interested because his goal
7 was to have a set schedule and a ship to finish out on
8 the rest of his career. And he, you know, he's put a
9 lot of steam ships to bed.

10 You know, so he was tired of sending things
11 -- if you put lots of love and labor into, he was tired
12 of taking them to scrap. So he wanted to stay on
13 something that he could finish his career out with.
14 They had mentioned it to him. I want to say this was
15 going on for quite some time, like a really long time.
16 I can't give you exact months but it was kind of like a
17 carrot that was dangled in front of him for a very long
18 time regarding going to these new ships.

19 And they would, you know, tell him oh yes,
20 yes, we're working on it, we're figuring out who we're
21 going to have there. And you know, oh you're on the
22 list, you're on the list of possible guys. You know,
23 so it was just a really ongoing saga. He hadn't heard
24 anything final.

25 They sent him to a training thing but he had

1 no idea if they were sending him as Chief or what they
2 were planning on doing with him, when he was going to
3 go, which ship he was going to go on.

4 He finally started to get some information
5 and he was supposed to check off the El Faro October
6 20th. And eight days later, he was supposed to report
7 out to San Diego. So as far as I know, he was supposed
8 to be going in for training for the new ship.

9 MR. YOUNG: And San Diego would be for
10 training, not to join the ship?

11 MS. PUSATERE: To join the ship, to be out
12 there to familiarize with the ship as they were, you
13 know, putting it together. And then to go out on the
14 first run with it.

15 MR. YOUNG: Oh okay. It seems like what
16 we've heard from others too is that there was a lot of,
17 I guess lack of communication when it came to the new
18 ships. And some people were chosen, some people
19 weren't. But it seemed to be a source of contention
20 with the group.

21 MS. PUSATERE: It was and it caused some,
22 you know, uncomfortableness with other people because
23 nobody knew what was happening. You know, everybody
24 wants a job. You know, and you know that the ship is
25 going away. Well that was another thing, the El Faro

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1 would go back and forth.

2 Like you know, there was kind of this
3 attitude that oh it's going to scrap, it's going to
4 scrap. And then like, all of the sudden, turn around,
5 you know, never mind, we're sending it to Alaska so
6 we've got to do all this stuff to it. So it was -- and
7 that seemed to be like turned on a dime honestly.

8 And then nobody knew what was -- I mean, and
9 I've heard this from other crew members saying this
10 too. It's like nobody knew if they had a job which is,
11 you know, a tough situation for people to be in. And
12 you know, when they hear rumblings -- you know, I know
13 Rich was very concerned about other people hearing
14 about whether or not he was being considered.

15 Like when they sent him to a training over
16 in, I believe it was Denmark or something, Sweden,
17 something like that. They sent him to some kind of
18 training overseas. You know, and people started to
19 make rumors. You know, and they were like oh, so
20 you're going. And he was like, well he didn't really
21 know anything because they hadn't told him what he was
22 going to be doing yet. You know, they just sent him to
23 the training.

24 So it was a very unsettling time. It was
25 very stressful for not only him, but for everybody.

1 Because you know, I mean, the job was a high priority
2 for folks.

3 MR. YOUNG: Got you. Something else we have
4 heard too about moving the ship over to Alaska, that
5 they had the Polish riding gang. Did Rich ever talk
6 about them or what they were doing on the ship?

7 MS. PUSATERE: With me, pretty much all I
8 got from him is there had been two guys that spoke
9 English and then they were suddenly not there. And
10 then, they'd have these guys on there who spoke no
11 English. And you know, it was kind of hard to -- you
12 know, it was a difficult working environment because
13 you couldn't really communicate with these people that
14 you're working with. My neighbor, who happens to also
15 be our general contractor had recently done a very
16 large job at our home with Rich, had stopped by the
17 other day. And he said that he and Rich had had
18 extended conversations about this.

19 And that the Polish guys, he said from what
20 he gathered was, the reason they were there was because
21 they had gotten the job by like really underbidding the
22 lowest bid by like \$180,000 to \$200,000. And then he
23 said that these guys, Rich had told him that these guys
24 would come up to Rich and ask him what these parts were
25 and that they'd never worked on a boiler before. You

1 know, so Rich didn't say that to me. He said that to
2 my neighbor but my neighbor said that to him. You
3 know, so he didn't go into big detail with me about
4 that. But I just thought that was interesting.

5 MR. YOUNG: Yes, that's definitely something
6 we are looking into as well. Do you think -- and this
7 might not be something you'd talk about. But do you
8 think you heard for sure that they might have been
9 working in the engine room on the boiler? Or
10 throughout the ship or --

11 MS. PUSATERE: That I am not sure on at all.
12 Like I said, the only thing I've really gotten was what
13 was from my neighbor. Like I knew that Rich had
14 contact with these guys and was working with these
15 guys. But in what capacity, I can't say for sure.

16 MR. YOUNG: Okay. Did Rich ever do any time
17 in addition to his Chief's time on the ship like as an
18 extra board? Like Jeff was doing some work --

19 MS. PUSATERE: No, no. In the past, he
20 probably did. But especially since our daughter was
21 born, he was very cognizant of -- when he could get
22 home, he wanted to come home.

23 MR. YOUNG: Okay. Got you. Because I do
24 know like Jeff was aboard and even the other Chief had
25 done some time aboard working with the Polish

1 specifically for that reason.

2 MS. PUSATERE: Right, right. And to that,
3 no, Rich was, you know, he was trying to finish out his
4 time on whatever, on the EL Faro right now. And then
5 just get out and focus -- he kind of had a laser focus
6 on getting on that new ship.

7 MR. YOUNG: Yes. And now, going to sea for
8 25 years and being married 29 years, kind of don't tell
9 your wife everything about what happens out there. But
10 did Rich explain or give you any detail on how he felt
11 about the ship? Whether he thought it was a decent
12 ship or a rust bucket or lots of problems, or anything
13 machinery wise? Talk to you about --

14 MS. PUSATERE: He didn't get into specifics.
15 Because you know, I'm not an engineer and you know, it
16 was like me trying to explain shoes to him.

17 MR. YOUNG: Yes.

18 MS. PUSATERE: So he didn't go into great
19 detail about that. But I can tell you this trip, that
20 they had a lot of issues. Because typically, he would
21 call me Mondays, Tuesdays, and Fridays. I would get
22 him for any time for half an hour to an hour.
23 Sometimes I'd get to talk to him several times in a
24 day. We tried to FaceTime so, you know, our daughter
25 could see him.

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1 This trip, the first almost solid month,
2 total for the week, I would get to speak to him for ten
3 minutes. So like, he'd call or he wouldn't call or
4 he'd text me and say can't call today, too busy, can't
5 call today. I know he worked a lot of late nights. I
6 know they did -- I don't know what they were doing but
7 I know there was a lot going on to the point that he
8 couldn't call me on a regular basis.

9 And that's very unlike him. You know,
10 especially with our daughter, you know, he very much
11 enjoys their FaceTime sessions. They play peek-a-boo
12 and all that. So he wouldn't miss that for the world.
13 And so I know that there was probably things going on
14 that were, you know, obviously of a very important
15 nature.

16 And I just know that his stress level was
17 fairly high on this trip. Because you know, he was
18 just, he was exhausted. There was a lot going on. And
19 he wasn't specific as to what but I know that there
20 were things happening.

21 MR. YOUNG: Okay. And any chance he may
22 have sent pictures? Obviously he's going to send
23 pictures, maybe of himself to you and your daughter.
24 But is there any pictures that you may have that in the
25 background, they may have some sort of pictures of the

1 engine room or (inaudible) equipment or anything?

2 MS. PUSATERE: No he didn't even send
3 pictures of himself. He's a very modest man.

4 MR. YOUNG: Okay.

5 MS. PUSATERE: So unfortunately, no. I do
6 not have any pictures. And if I did, I would certainly
7 pass them along to you.

8 MR. KUCHARSKI: Brian, quick question.

9 MR. YOUNG: Yes, sure.

10 MR. KUCHARSKI: Hi Emily, Mike Kucharski.
11 When you say trip, are you talking about this tour,
12 this ten week --

13 MS. PUSATERE: Correct.

14 MR. KUCHARSKI: -- time onboard the ship?
15 Okay.

16 MS. PUSATERE: Yes. Not just the current
17 trip, the voyage from Jacksonville that led to October
18 1st. The whole time they were having difficulties. I
19 can tell you on Tuesday, the Tuesday before this
20 happened, Monday we'd actually had a chance -- I guess
21 at the first month it was pretty tough.

22 But then for like the two weeks after, you
23 know, things had gotten a little bit better. He still
24 didn't have a ton of time. But the Monday before all
25 of this happened, you know, we had a nice chunk of time

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1 to FaceTime and everything. And I'm very grateful for
2 that at this moment.

3 Tuesday he called me and we had been on the
4 phone for maybe 30 seconds, less than a minute, and he
5 got a phone call. I heard something buzzing in the
6 background. He said, you need me to come down? And he
7 gets back on the phone with me, says I've got to go,
8 call you back and that was it.

9 MR. YOUNG: So someone called him from the
10 engine room and he had to go down below?

11 MS. PUSATERE: Yes. He asked twice because
12 he said you need me to come down? Or you need me to
13 come down right now? And then --

14 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay.

15 MR. YOUNG: Did he work with this Captain
16 Davidson frequently?

17 MS. PUSATERE: He wouldn't tell me a lot of
18 the guys names. You know, but I mean, I was looking
19 through his discharge sheets and I have several from
20 Captain Davidson.

21 MR. YOUNG: And typically, on the ship, you
22 know, the Captain and the Chief kind of do communicate
23 a lot. They have to talk a lot about ships arrival,
24 departure, things broken, (inaudible).

25 MS. PUSATERE: Right.

1 MR. YOUNG: Did he seem like he, how was his
2 relationship with Captain Davidson, as far as you knew?

3 MS. PUSATERE: I am not 100 percent sure, to
4 be honest. He complained -- he would just say this
5 Captain so I don't know if he meant this Captain or
6 another Captain. I know one of the Captains, he didn't
7 have -- I don't want to say he didn't have a whole lot
8 of regard for. Like he liked the guy, but you know,
9 the guy kind of had his own way of doing things. But I
10 can't say if that was Davidson or not because he didn't
11 use his name.

12 MR. YOUNG: Okay.

13 MS. PUSATERE: He did say on this trip
14 though that they had him -- like the Captain was kind
15 of getting on him for like cosmetic things on the ship.
16 Not necessarily the engineering things but they were
17 like, oh we want this repainted. You know, and they
18 were having other issues. So he was kind of frustrated
19 about that.

20 MR. YOUNG: We have to be careful. We have
21 a Captain listening in and talking with us. So us
22 engineers, we can't talk about the Captain.

23 MS. PUSATERE: Right.

24 MR. YOUNG: That's their priorities, to have
25 things painted and looking pretty.

1 MS. PUSATERE: Richard was actually an
2 extremely meticulous man too. I was just explaining to
3 my attorney, he's Mr. Spreadsheet, you know. And he
4 usually has everything just so. I don't know if it's
5 an engineering thing or what but he was very much an
6 attention to detail person.

7 So normally, he understands that. He's the
8 guy who's always yelling at the guys that he works with
9 to tuck in their shirts because he thinks it's
10 important to look presentable, especially when you have
11 people on the ship. So he's very much into, you know,
12 dotting his I's, crossing his T's.

13 So for him to say, you know, like he's
14 getting on me about, you know, making sure this gets
15 painted or whatever. For him to say that means that
16 there were -- he had other compelling things on his
17 plate that were much more concerning than painting.

18 MR. KUCHARSKI: Yes. That's a (inaudible).

19 MS. PUSATERE: Yes.

20 MR. YOUNG: And we have heard that from
21 other crew members that had worked with Rich, saying
22 that he is very meticulous. I know from ships I've
23 worked on. How about safety wise? Did he ever tell
24 you aboard the ships if people were always wearing
25 their helmets and safety glasses and lots of drills and

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1 training? Did it sound like there was a lot of that
2 going on?

3 MS. PUSATERE: I believe there would be.
4 And I also, you know, I know that Rich is -- if he ever
5 got angry at somebody, it would be over a safety issue.
6 Like he would never get angry about somebody over, you
7 know, making a mistake unless there was a safety issue
8 at hand. Or if they were doing something where they
9 were putting themselves or somebody else in danger.
10 And that would be the only time he would actually get
11 upset with somebody.

12 So he was very adamant about that. He you
13 know, he made all the guys wear safety goggles. He
14 made everybody wear ear plugs. Like he was very much
15 about safety. You know, like I said, his dad's a first
16 responder. I'm not even allowed to have candles in the
17 house. So that gives you a kind of indication of the
18 safety level.

19 You know, I know he did, he would tell me
20 like you know, anecdotal stories about, you know, oh
21 this guy he was trying to do this and I'm like, where
22 are your safety goggles? Like if he saw anybody doing
23 anything that he thought was even remotely dangerous,
24 he would definitely step in.

25 MR. YOUNG: Sounds like a very typical Fort

1 Schuyler Chief.

2 MS. PUSATERE: Yes.

3 MR. YOUNG: And how about the guys that
4 worked for him, the other engineers, the junior
5 engineers, the oilers and electricians, did he ever say
6 that they had a pretty good team going together? He
7 liked who he worked with?

8 MS. PUSATERE: Yes. I know he spoke of
9 Howie (phonetic) a pretty good deal. Some of the other
10 guys I'm not as familiar with. They kind of, like I
11 know Howie's like, he told him he was like Mr. Clean.
12 So that's how he'd always refer to me, refer to Howie
13 as to me. You know, and they seemed to have a very
14 good rapport. They'd worked together for quite some
15 time.

16 Some of the other guys, I'm not sure as sure
17 of. But like I never got any indication that he was
18 butting heads with anybody or people were giving him a
19 hard time.

20 MR. YOUNG: That's good. And any indication
21 of if he had to fire anybody or any other Chiefs off
22 that ship? Or a person of his maybe had quit or got
23 fired?

24 MS. PUSATERE: Not on this trip or recent
25 trips. Not that I can think of, no.

1 MR. YOUNG: Okay.

2 MS. PUSATERE: Or not that he mentioned at
3 least.

4 MR. YOUNG: Yes. Okay. And again, you
5 know, trying to dig as much engineering information, I
6 probably will contact his dad. I think that would be a
7 good person to talk to with it. Because just trying to
8 dig out any information.

9 But really, nothing in terms of, in the
10 times you talked to him, that he would say anything
11 specific like, you know, the boiler is broken? Or
12 typically the stuff that makes the ship go, the boiler,
13 the turbine, that there was any indication that those
14 two giant pieces of machinery may have had issues?

15 MS. PUSATERE: He did not say anything
16 specific to me. And I mean, like I know that they were
17 doing a lot of work. And like I said, I just know that
18 there was obviously things going on. But as to the
19 nature of those things, I can't say with any certainty.

20 And I'm also trying to not step into --
21 because you know, of course, with everything that's
22 been going on, I've been doing a lot of research and
23 reading all the articles. And I know he took down the
24 boiler at one point and that was from an article I got.

25 I don't want to step into the area where I'm

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1 thinking information that I got from an article is the
2 information that I received from him. So I can't say
3 with any 100 percent assurity that he said anything
4 about the boilers or turbines specifically. But I do
5 know there was a lot going on and he was abnormally
6 busy on this ten week route.

7 MR. YOUNG: Understood. And we appreciate
8 that there's speculation, you know, based on what the
9 media is reporting.

10 MS. PUSATERE: Right and that doesn't do
11 anybody any good.

12 MR. YOUNG: I know. Exactly, yes.

13 MS. PUSATERE: I want answers just as much
14 as you do.

15 MR. YOUNG: Got you. So I'm going to pass
16 the microphone over to Mike Kucharski. He's the deck
17 department Captain, Nautical Operations. That's his
18 specialty and I think he's got a tremendous amount of
19 experience not only from sailing Captain, since I think
20 Noah's Ark if I recollect right. Plus being Captain on
21 that ship. So you know, he's going to have some very,
22 very high powered questions. So I'll let Captain Mike
23 talk.

24 MS. PUSATERE: Thank you very much for your
25 time.

1 MR. YOUNG: Thank you so much, I really
2 appreciate it. And we'll go again so if you have
3 anything to say after Mike and Carrie.

4 MR. KUCHARSKI: This is Mike Kucharski. I
5 expected the trumpets and the drum roll. With a lead
6 up like that, I don't know. I think I'm just going to
7 put my phone back on mute and shock everybody. But I
8 really, Emily, I don't have a huge amount of questions.

9 Just overall things that Rich talked about,
10 about safety culture or how it was on the ship on that
11 run. Did he feel like he was under the gun beforehand,
12 you know, with keeping schedule and maintenance?
13 Anything that he brought up?

14 MS. PUSATERE: Well I do believe there was,
15 you know, a fair amount of pressure about, you know,
16 the scheduling and whatnot. Like I don't know where
17 that pressure was necessarily coming from. You know,
18 so again that wasn't really -- you know, he really
19 doesn't go into great detail when he calls.

20 Typically, it's you know, he really wants to
21 talk to me and talk about the baby and talk about home.
22 You know? He doesn't really go into great detail. And
23 so unfortunately, I wish I had more information
24 regarding that.

25 I do know that there were times when he was

1 extremely stressed on the ship. And I know it's the
2 nature of the job. But you know, there were times
3 when, you know, like they would go back and forth about
4 fuel consumption. And I don't know if it was
5 necessarily with Captain Davidson or another Captain.

6 But I know that like, you know, Rich would
7 have a certain -- you know, he was very good with his
8 calculations. And they'd go back and forth about that
9 or what speed they were supposed to be going. Or you
10 know, why are we -- you know, Rich has always been a
11 slow and steady wins the race type person. No need to,
12 you know, go full throttle all the time.

13 So he, you know, I know that they would go
14 back and forth a bit about that. But you know, but
15 again, I don't know if that was with Captain Davidson
16 or another Captain.

17 MR. KUCHARSKI: Thank you. Any incident
18 that happened in the past couple years that rings out
19 or jogs your memory? Anything that happened on the
20 ship?

21 MS. PUSATERE: No. Like I said, I mean I
22 know, like I said, really the only thing is about like
23 the fuel consumption. You know, or I know he tried to
24 put in, you know, he'd have projects that he wanted to
25 get done. And you know, sometimes he'd be diverted to

1 other things that, you know, were thought to be more
2 important. But other than that, like I can't give
3 specifics unfortunately.

4 MR. KUCHARSKI: That's okay. Thank you.
5 And if you do think of anything, you'll have our
6 numbers. How about the contractor you mentioned? You
7 said you have a contractor that's a neighbor that Rich
8 talked to.

9 MS. PUSATERE: Yes. He did the
10 construction, recent remodel on our home. And you
11 know, he was just talking. I don't know how
12 excessively they talked about any other issues on the
13 ship. But he did mention the Polish guys and how, you
14 know, they didn't know what the parts were for. So
15 that was very concerning to Rich.

16 He said they would come up to him with parts
17 and they're like, what do I do with? He's just kind of
18 looking at them like, it goes on the boiler, don't you
19 know that? And they're like, no. He said he had the
20 feeling that they'd never worked on a boiler.

21 I don't know that they were working on the
22 boiler but the contractor definitely said boiler. So I
23 feel that probably means that they were doing something
24 with the boiler.

25 MR. KUCHARSKI: And do you, would you mind

1 passing us, when we get off -- I don't know if Brian
2 has it yet, but the contractor's name and contact
3 information in case we'd like to talk to him?

4 MS. PUSATERE: Absolutely, absolutely.

5 MR. KUCHARSKI: Great, great. I don't have
6 any further questions at this point.

7 MS. PUSATERE: Sure.

8 MR. KUCHARSKI: I thank you again for being
9 part of this, for agreeing to talk to us. By the way,
10 I was also Master on the Westward Venture.

11 MS. PUSATERE: Oh, were you? I think that
12 went to bed. I'm not sure if it's still running. I
13 think he took that one to scrap too. I know he's taken
14 like three ships to scrap.

15 MR. KUCHARSKI: Yes.

16 MS. PUSATERE: But yes, I've got a bunch of
17 Westward Venture hats and shirts around the house.

18 MR. KUCHARSKI: Now that was on the Alaska
19 run he was on the Westward Venture?

20 MS. PUSATERE: No, no. I don't believe he's
21 ever been to an Alaska run. I believe it was on an
22 east coast run actually. I'm not 100 percent sure
23 though. But I don't believe he's ever been to Alaska.

24 MR. KUCHARSKI: Oh okay. Very good. Thank
25 you very much.

1 MS. PUSATERE: Thank you for your time, sir.

2 MS. BELL: Hi Emily, it's Carrie.

3 MS. PUSATERE: Hi.

4 MS. BELL: I've got a few questions for you.

5 Some of them are really general. The first question I
6 have is just sort of, in comparison to other ships that
7 he has worked on, has he ever mentioned anything to you
8 about just the environment in which he was working?

9 I know the engine rooms are hot. But in
10 general, like the environment that he was working on.
11 Does he ever mention if it was different in any way
12 from other ships that he worked on?

13 MS. PUSATERE: No, no. I mean it was pretty
14 much what you said, hot. That's pretty much all I
15 heard about all the time, regarding about the
16 thermostat. You don't know what hot is until -- but
17 aside from that, no. Like he didn't say anything
18 particular that was different about this ship.

19 MS. BELL: Do you know if they did anything
20 to try to alleviate the heat in the engine room?

21 MS. PUSATERE: The heat honestly didn't
22 really bother him that much. Like he got to a point
23 where it really didn't phase him. Actually if you guys
24 end up speaking to my contractor, he'll tell you about
25 how he didn't turn the air conditioning on. And all

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1 the guys on the job crew were getting dehydrated and
2 Rich was still working away. He got to the point where
3 it just, it didn't really bother him. He didn't really
4 complain about the heat.

5 MS. BELL: Yes. Okay. Anything else
6 though, in terms of safety or anything like that that
7 he said that stood out to him that he might have
8 mentioned?

9 MS. PUSATERE: Not particularly, no. Not
10 that I can think of off the top of my head. You know,
11 I'll go back and read through some of my emails and
12 stuff like that to see if anything pops out. But from
13 the top of my head, I really can't think of anything
14 that -- and like I said, because he switched around the
15 ships for the past, you know, for a few years.

16 You know, so I wouldn't know for sure if he
17 was on the El Faro or the El Morro or the El Yunque.
18 You know, he wouldn't (inaudible). But you know,
19 sometimes he would swap onto one of the other ones.
20 And so, you know, I don't want to say anything that I'm
21 not 100 percent sure on.

22 MS. BELL: I understand. What about in
23 terms of the crew that he was working with? Would you
24 say anything about the morale, if it was good, bad?

25 MS. PUSATERE: I think, you know, their

1 interpersonal relationships were good. I think there
2 was kind of a stress from the, not knowing what was
3 going to happen. Because they knew that the ship was
4 going to be, you know, not doing this run anymore.

5 And so, I know there was some frustration
6 there with people not knowing if they were going to
7 have jobs. The uncertainty was a little bit of a
8 factor for some people. But I know it was a factor for
9 Rich.

10 You know, I know he was definitely very
11 laser focused on, you know, having something lined up
12 for when this run was over. He wanted to know he had a
13 job. He wanted to know he had a career. He didn't
14 want to just go onto another ship to send that one to
15 scrap too.

16 He wanted to be on another ship for the rest
17 of his career and not have to worry about jumping
18 around anymore. And so, I can't speak for other
19 families but I wouldn't be surprised if other people
20 were in the same situation.

21 MS. BELL: Right. And you mentioned that he
22 went overseas for training.

23 MS. PUSATERE: Yes, he did.

24 MS. BELL: When was that? And what was that
25 for? Do you remember?

1 MS. PUSATERE: It was basically kind of like
2 information about the LNG engines. And I'm trying to
3 think of when that was. I think it was in the spring
4 of this year. I remember it was still cold.

5 MS. BELL: Okay.

6 MS. PUSATERE: I mean, it was early this
7 year but I don't remember exactly. I'm sorry.

8 MS. BELL: Do you know how long it lasted?

9 MS. PUSATERE: I believe it was a week.

10 MS. BELL: Okay. And you also mentioned --
11 I'm jumping a little bit from one thing to another.

12 MS. PUSATERE: Sure.

13 MS. BELL: You mentioned that he was
14 exhausted and that this was a really busy trip. So
15 would you say -- do you know anything about his sleep
16 schedule at all? Or how much sleep he was getting?

17 MS. PUSATERE: It was all over the place.
18 But I mean, he was used to that. You know, when he
19 would come home like we kind of -- I mean, because with
20 a Chief, you have to be ready at any time. Like if
21 there's an issue going on in the engine room, you have
22 to be ready to get up and go to work right away. You
23 know, and that's the nature of the job.

24 He was very good about that. You know, he
25 always knew when he was getting fatigued, you know, he

1 would make sure that he would get some rest of some
2 sort. You know, and I think sometimes that's why he
3 would forego talking to me, is because he knew he
4 needed to take that time to sleep. And I understood
5 that. You know, like I never got mad at him for that
6 because that is his job.

7 And you know, if anything, that's where his
8 focus, you know, when he's on the ship, his focus is
9 the ship. When he's at home, his focus is at home.
10 You know, and so I know he was very cognizant of his
11 own well being. You know, I know he was tired but he
12 was feeling well. He wasn't like ill or anything like
13 that.

14 As for the stress level, I do believe there
15 was stress there. But I feel everybody was stressed
16 because it was just an abnormally stressful trip or
17 rotation, for him at least. Like I said, the time
18 factor, it was surprising to me. Because I'm used to
19 him sometimes having to miss a phone call with me. But
20 I'm not used to, you know, three weeks in a row of not
21 really getting to talk to him for more than ten
22 minutes.

23 MS. BELL: Right. And do you know how long
24 he was on this trip, how long he had been on?

25 MS. PUSATERE: Let me see, he would have

1 left middle August.

2 MS. BELL: Middle of August?

3 MS. PUSATERE: Yes.

4 MS. BELL: Okay.

5 MS. PUSATERE: It would have been about
6 seven weeks because I had two -- the 20th he was
7 supposed to come home.

8 MS. BELL: Okay. Seven weeks. Okay. Do
9 you know if there were, if he was aware or if he
10 mentioned to you that anyone had filed any grievances
11 against the company or anything?

12 MS. PUSATERE: Not that I'm aware of.

13 MS. BELL: Okay. And I have one more
14 question and then I'll stop. What about any kind of
15 pressure to keep a schedule? You know, just getting
16 out the door, you know, getting, you know, to depart
17 from the port. Things like that because they have to
18 be somewhere at a certain time. Any kind of --

19 MS. PUSATERE: Yes, that was definitely an
20 element. You know, it was a factor of his job. You
21 know, because people do have deadlines. And sometimes
22 they were, I know that they transported, you know,
23 pharmaceuticals and refrigerated items. So there's
24 kind of a window for that also.

25 But as for specifics, I can't say. Like I

1 can't think of a particular incident when it was, you
2 know, like oh they're really railing on me about, you
3 know, we have to get there now. I can't think of
4 anything like that specifically. But I do know, you
5 know, that they were under pressure to keep time.

6 And I also know that, you know, like I said,
7 they were having -- they would go back and forth with a
8 Captain, and not necessarily Captain Davidson. Like I
9 said, I don't remember for sure. But about like, you
10 know, fuel usage and how fast the ship was going and,
11 you know, things like that.

12 MS. BELL: Okay. That's all I have. Thank
13 you very much.

14 MS. PUSATERE: You're welcome. And if I do
15 think of anything -- because like, now that you're
16 saying the grievances, like I'm thinking of something
17 but I can't remember exactly. And I'm trying to think
18 about that right now. So if I think of anything else,
19 I'll let you know, for sure.

20 MS. BELL: Okay. I'll come back at the end
21 of our interview and see if maybe something comes up.

22 MS. PUSATERE: I'm going to have to think
23 hard on it. Because like, I feel like there's
24 something that he mentioned at some point but I can't
25 remember it. Unfortunately, my Rolodex doesn't move as

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1 fast as it used to. I think it's a side effect of
2 motherhood, I'm not sure.

3 MS. BELL: Okay. Thank you.

4 MR. FAWCETT: Hey Emily, this is Keith
5 Fawcett with the Coast Guard. I have a few questions
6 for you. Okay?

7 MS. PUSATERE: Of course.

8 MR. FAWCETT: When the contractor that was
9 working on your house, he talked about the Polish
10 riding gang and the work they were doing. Could there
11 have been any times that they might have confused, you
12 know, in telling you this story in other words, in
13 getting the story, the word boiler with heater? In
14 other words, you know, we know that they were working
15 on a heating system. Could there be some confusion
16 there perhaps, in the way it was reported to you?

17 MS. PUSATERE: I'm not 100 percent sure.
18 And in fact, I would say that you would probably want
19 to talk to him about that. Because he said boiler to
20 me and so, that's all I can go off of. You know, like
21 honestly I don't even know. It was a huge part of the
22 ship. So sorry, I'm obviously naive about my husband's
23 job.

24 You know, that's what he said to me. So I
25 would defer anything about that to him. Just because,

1 you know, I can't speculate as to -- yes, I can't
2 speculate what the contractor meant. Because he said
3 boiler so I'm assuming he meant boiler. But he may, I
4 don't know. He doesn't work on a ship so he might not
5 know what he's talking about either.

6 MR. FAWCETT: All right. Was there any
7 mention about the El Faro in particular, about how she
8 boated the weather? Or any other, like bad weather
9 experiences that, while your husband was aboard the
10 ship?

11 MS. PUSATERE: He didn't say anything
12 particular about the El Faro. You know, I know that
13 they'd hit some weather a few times and he would say
14 they were rocking and rolling. But that would be about
15 it. He didn't say anything about how the ship handled
16 in the weather or anything like that.

17 MR. FAWCETT: And how about any, did he ever
18 relay to you about any damage that the cargo received?
19 You know, lost containers or busted up cargo? Or even
20 damage to the ship perhaps?

21 MS. PUSATERE: I'm trying to think. And
22 again, I'm trying to not get the El Faro confused
23 because he's been on so many ships. You know? I don't
24 believe. I mean, I know he told me about, you know,
25 there had been cargo losses before but he didn't give

1 me specifics.

2 MR. FAWCETT: All right. In late August,
3 the El Faro departed Jacksonville and they were en
4 route to San Juan. And they didn't go the typical
5 route which has been described as like riding on
6 railroad tracks back and forth from Jacksonville to San
7 Juan. This time, they went down between the Bahamas
8 and Florida and then cut through the Old Bahama Channel
9 north of Cuba. Did your husband say anything about
10 that voyage?

11 MS. PUSATERE: No, not that I can recall
12 from anything specific right now. He didn't really
13 tell me about, you know, like their travel plans very
14 often. I wish he had at this point. That'd be really
15 helpful.

16 Pretty much, he would call and ask me about
17 our daughter. And you know, how bills were going well
18 and why I put my thermostat up so high. You know, so
19 unfortunately, he did not mention that at all. But I
20 can certainly try to double check through my emails and
21 see if he did say anything about it.

22 MR. FAWCETT: Yes, that would be very
23 helpful. How about, we understand that senior officers
24 on the ship received evaluations on an annual basis.
25 Did he talk to you about his evaluations?

1 MS. PUSATERE: He did not.

2 MR. FAWCETT: So he didn't talk to you about
3 his evaluations? Did he talk to you at all about his
4 role as Chief and, you know, what people thought about
5 the job he was doing or anything like that?

6 MS. PUSATERE: You know, he told me, you
7 know, this was his career goal. You know, at some
8 point he wanted to be a Chief on a steam ship. You
9 know, before steam ships weren't being used anymore, he
10 wanted to make sure he made it to Chief on a steam
11 ship.

12 So I know there was a great amount of pride
13 with his role. But at the same time, it's a love of
14 the craft. It's a love of the job for him. From what
15 I've gathered from many other people who have worked
16 with him, he might have been very, he expected people
17 to do their job very well. But people respected him
18 for that.

19 And I haven't heard anybody say anything --
20 and as far as I know, from things he said to me, like
21 people generally didn't give him a lot of difficulty
22 when he would ask them to do particular things.

23 So I mean, I know he had to do reviews for
24 people. But he would always, you know, he would
25 explain to me that, you know, he'd have to talk to them

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1 afterwards and he would be very fair.

2 And then people seemed to take what he had
3 to say to heart. You know, so in general, I feel like
4 he felt very comfortable being a Chief. I think it was
5 a bit of a change in him from not always being in the
6 engine room but having to take some more of the office
7 side of it, you know, management side of it.

8 But I really do feel that he was doing a
9 good job. He felt confident in his abilities. And I
10 feel he had a good relationship with the people he
11 worked with.

12 MR. FAWCETT: Thank you. So does your
13 husband have any like -- a lot of us carry like our own
14 personal green pocket notebooks that carry all of our
15 notes and records about the jobs that we do. Ship
16 pilots, for example, log every trip. Did Rich have any
17 of those kind of documents that may be helpful to us?

18 MS. PUSATERE: If he did, he probably had
19 them with him. I wouldn't be surprised if on his
20 laptop he had something but that would be with him. I
21 know he carried a notebook in his -- he was
22 specifically wearing Hanes pocket tees just so he could
23 wear his, write it in the rain notebook in his pocket
24 at all times. So I know he took, you know, notes on
25 things. But there isn't anything at the house. I've

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1 been slowly going through things and I haven't come
2 across anything as of yet. But if I do, I will
3 certainly let you guys know.

4 MR. FAWCETT: Okay. Thank you. And really
5 my final question is, we kind of asked some questions
6 about kind of like the morale on the ship and any
7 issues that are on the ship. And I work with Carrie on
8 the Human Performance Group and we're very concerned
9 about decisions that were made onboard the ship.

10 So is there anything -- and you make take a
11 second to think about it. But the inter-relationship
12 between the officers on the crew and how they
13 interacted. And that goes down from the officers to
14 the crew. Can you think of anything that might have
15 influenced how those people made decisions relationship
16 wise?

17 Like were there strained relationships
18 between certain officers of the crew? Or was it, from
19 your understanding, you know, straightforward working
20 relationships? It would be very helpful if you could
21 think of anything that you may have knowledge of.

22 MS. PUSATERE: All I can say, I can only say
23 from, you know, again from my husband's conversations
24 to me. And so he really doesn't talk about, he's not
25 much of a gossip type person. He doesn't really, you

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1 know, proliferate hearsay or, you know, oh this guy was
2 talking crap about that guy. He doesn't even pay any
3 of that stuff much mind because he feels like it kind
4 of detracts from why they're there which is, they're
5 there to do a job and then go home.

6 So you know, I do know that from his
7 perspective, you know, he was a little bit frustrated
8 at the Captain. And I don't know if it was Captain
9 Davidson who was at the time. I do know he was
10 frustrated at the little projects that he was coming up
11 with and the little things that he was doing.

12 And there was a little bit of a strain
13 there. But other than that -- and I do feel that there
14 was a lot of frustration with people not knowing about
15 their jobs for the future. But aside from that, like
16 about specific arguments or people or specific, you
17 know, in fighting, I don't know off the top of my head.
18 And I'm sorry that I don't have more information about
19 that.

20 MR. FAWCETT: That's completely
21 understandable. And thank you very much Emily.

22 MS. PUSATERE: Of course.

23 MR. YOUNG: This is Brian Young again.
24 Emily, I just have one last question. I know you said
25 on Monday, I think it was the 28th, you had a very

1 short conversation because they called Rich down to the
2 engine room. At any point, was there any discussion
3 about the impending weather or tropical storm that was
4 being watched?

5 MS. PUSATERE: You know, it's funny you say
6 that. Because you know, normally I would -- because we
7 live in a flood area, flood zone in my neighborhood.
8 So I always keep track of the storms because, you know,
9 obviously I want to be prepared. Normally if I saw
10 something out there, I'd say to him, hey did you know
11 there's a storm out there? Be careful, blah, blah,
12 blah.

13 And he would always tell me, this is, he's
14 like what are you worried about? He said, you know,
15 I'm safer on the ship than I am in port. You know, or
16 he would he tell that, you know, this is what these
17 guys do. That's what the deck officers are there for,
18 they keep us out of trouble.

19 And so, I even think about it. Like
20 honestly -- my mother-in-law, you know, because she
21 lives up in New York. And the storm was either
22 projected to hit Virginia Beach or New York. And I,
23 you know, I called her and I said, are you keeping an
24 eye on the storm? And she asked me, she said oh yes.
25 She's like, is Richard okay? Do you think he's all

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1 right down there?

2 And I said oh yes. I didn't even think
3 about it. I didn't even worry about it. Like this
4 never even crossed my mind as a concern to be
5 completely honest, which is part of the whole shock of
6 this. Like if you had told me that something else had
7 happened, I would have believed it. If you had told me
8 pirates, I would have believed that so much faster than
9 a hurricane, to be completely honest.

10 This is, it's just beyond the realm of, you
11 know -- I mean it just doesn't make any sense to me.
12 So the storm, that they were anywhere close to it.
13 That doesn't make sense to me. But other than that,
14 like you know, he hadn't mentioned anything about the
15 storm. But again, he was getting ready to go. So you
16 know --

17 MR. YOUNG: Okay. And I'm all set and I do
18 appreciate your time. I'm just going to see if anybody
19 else on the phone has any questions. And then maybe
20 see if you have any other questions for us. Mike, you
21 all set?

22 MR. KUCHARSKI: I'm all set. Thank you
23 Emily.

24 MS. PUSATERE: Thank you.

25 MR. YOUNG: Carrie?

1 MS. BELL: No I don't have any other
2 questions. Just a reminder about the grievances, if
3 you think of anything there, just to --

4 MS. PUSATERE: Okay.

5 MS. BELL: -- shoot me an email once you
6 have our contact information.

7 MS. PUSATERE: If I do think of anything,
8 should I pass them along through Katy?

9 MS. BELL: That's fine. If you maybe copy -
10 - you'll have all of our email addresses. So you could
11 copy me with her.

12 MS. PUSATERE: Okay.

13 MR. YOUNG: And Katy will forward anything
14 that you ask to us too. So if you want to just, you
15 know, continue your communication through her. You
16 know, she's a great point of contact. Or however it's
17 easiest and most convenient for you.

18 MS. PUSATERE: Okay. And if I think of
19 anything else, like I said, I'll be sure to pass it
20 along. And would it be best for me to -- because I
21 would also like to give my contractor a little bit of a
22 heads up that, you know, somebody may be contacting
23 him. You know, would it be best for me to pass his
24 contact information along through Katy?

25 MR. YOUNG: Sure. Yes, that's fine too.

1 And the same thing, you know, if you would let him know
2 that, you know, we are looking to try to solve the
3 pieces of the puzzle. We're not trying to implicate
4 anybody. And just had some questions on, clarification
5 on some of the discussions they had. But yes,
6 absolutely, if you want to --

7 MS. PUSATERE: And after he brought up that
8 piece of information, I asked him if, you know, if my
9 attorney had any questions for him, you know, would it
10 be all right if my attorney spoke with him? And he
11 said oh absolutely.

12 MR. YOUNG: Okay.

13 MS. PUSATERE: Because I mean, he cares
14 about Rich not only as a contractor but as a neighbor.
15 My husband's a good guy and Dave (phonetic) is a really
16 good guy. And they spent a good amount of time
17 together after working on the house. I mean, you now,
18 guys talk more technical than they do to their wives.

19 MR. YOUNG: Absolutely, yes. Yes, that's
20 great. Keith?

21 MR. FAWCETT: I'm all set. Once again,
22 thank you very much Emily.

23 MS. PUSATERE: Thank you.

24 MR. YOUNG: And Emily, just before we do
25 kind of sign off, is there anything that maybe we

1 haven't asked you or any other information that you may
2 have heard you did want to share with us?

3 MS. PUSATERE: I can't think of anything. I
4 think we've covered, you know, the bulk of what I can,
5 you know, recently remember. But if I do think of
6 anything, I'll be sure to reach out to Katy and anybody
7 else about that.

8 MR. YOUNG: We really appreciate that. And
9 how about your turn if you have any questions for us as
10 far as anything you can think of. I know we've
11 bombarded you with questions.

12 MALE PARTICIPANT: Everything is fine.
13 Thank you all for the work that you do.

14 MR. YOUNG: Great. So thank you very much
15 Emily. I will follow up with an email with all our
16 contact information.

17 MS. PUSATERE: Thank you. I will look for
18 that. And I hope you all have a great Thanksgiving.

19 MS. BELL: Thank you. You too.

20 MR. YOUNG: Thank you so much. We
21 appreciate your time. Okay. So we'll sign off.
22 Thanks again.

23 (Whereupon, the above-entitled matter went
24 off the record.)


25

C E R T I F I C A T E

MATTER: The El Faro Incident
Interview of Emily Pusatere
Docket No. DCA16MM001
Teleconference

DATE: 11-23-15

I hereby certify that the attached transcription of page 1 to 46 inclusive are to the best of my professional ability a true, accurate, and complete record of the above referenced proceedings as contained on the provided audio recording; further that I am neither counsel for, nor related to, nor employed by any of the parties to this action in which this proceeding has taken place; and further that I am not financially nor otherwise interested in the outcome of the action.



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